

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 091 760

CS 201 365

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TITLE Schroeder Composition Scale.  
PUB DATE 73  
NOTE 12p.; See related documents CS 201 320-375

HDRS PRICE MF-\$0.75 HC-\$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE  
DESCRIPTORS \*Composition (Literary); \*Educational Research;  
Elementary School Students; Junior High School  
Students; Language Arts; \*Measurement Instruments;  
\*Prose; Research Tools; Resource Materials  
IDENTIFIERS \*The Research Instruments Project; TRIP

ABSTRACT

Designed to describe the writing behaviors of elementary and junior high school children, the Schroeder Composition Scale is an analytic scale. For eleven of the criteria in the scale, the scoring is simply "yes" or "no" indicating whether the writing does or does not have the characteristic. Five other items identify percentages of communication units with specific characteristics, and two final items concern total word count and words per communication unit. The agreement between two trained raters on each of the separate items in the scale ranged from 67 percent to 100 percent. [This document is one of those reviewed in The Research Instruments Project (TRIP) monograph "Measures for Research and Evaluation in the English Language Arts" to be published by the Committee on Research of the National Council of Teachers of English in cooperation with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills. A TRIP review which precedes the document lists its category (Writing), title, author, date, and age range (primary--junior high), and describes the instrument's purpose and physical characteristics.] (JH)

# NCTE Committee on Research

The Research Instruments Project (TRIP)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,  
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The attached document contains one of the measures reviewed in the TRIP committee monograph titled:

Measures for Research and Evaluation  
in the English Language Arts

TRIP is an acronym which signifies an effort to abstract and make readily available measures for research and evaluation in the English language arts. These measures relate to language development, listening, literature, reading, standard English as a second language or dialect, teacher competencies, or writing. In order to make these instruments more readily available, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills has supported the TRIP committee sponsored by the Committee on Research of the National Council of Teachers of English and has processed the material into the ERIC system. The ERIC Clearinghouse accession numbers that encompass most of these documents are CS 201320 - CS 201375.

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Category: Writing

Title: Schroeder Composition Scale

Author: Thomas S. Schroeder

Age Range: Primary-Junior High

Description of the Instrument:

Purpose: To describe the writing behaviors of elementary and junior high children.

Date of Construction: 1973

Physical Description: The SCS is an analytic scale, designed to be used to describe the characteristics of all the types of prose writing of elementary and junior high school children. For eleven of the criteria in the scale, the scoring is simply yes or no, the writing does or does not have the characteristic: maintains simple time sequence, uses a concluding sentence, gives story a title, expresses theme or abstract generalization, uses direct discourse, uses imaginative ideas, uses repetition to heighten effect, uses original figure of speech, includes emotion or personal reaction, uses descriptive passage, expresses humor. Four other items in the scale identify the percentages of communication units with the following characteristics: completeness, capital letter beginning, correct terminal punctuation, coordination, subordination. Two final items are total word count and words per communication unit, making a total of eighteen items in the SCS.

The complete report includes detailed instructions for using SCS.



## Validity, Reliability, and Normative Data

The validity of SCS rests on the following statement from the report:  
"An examination of the items on the instrument will show that they deal directly with observable writing behaviors."

The agreement between two trained raters on each of the separate items in SCS ranged from 67 percent to 100 percent.

## Ordering Information:

EDRS

## Related Documents:

Thomas S. Schroeder. The Effects of Positive and Corrective Written Teacher Feedback on Selected Writing Behaviors of Fourth Grade Children.  
Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1973. Order No. 73-30869

Schroeder Composition Scale

DATA RECORD SHEET

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Child \_\_\_\_\_

(Yes or No)

- 1. Maintains simple time sequence \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Uses a concluding sentence \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Gives story a title \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Expresses theme or abstract generalization \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Uses direct discourse \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Uses imaginative ideas \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Uses repetition to heighten effect \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Uses original figure of speech \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Includes emotional or personal reaction \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. Uses descriptive passage \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Expresses humor \_\_\_\_\_

- |   | (tally) | (freq.)  | (%)   |
|---|---------|--|-------|
| 12. Communication units (fragments)                       | _____   | <input type="checkbox"/>                                 | _____ |
| 13. Communication units with capital letters correct      | _____   | a <input type="checkbox"/><br>b <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 14. Communication units with terminal punctuation correct | _____   | a <input type="checkbox"/><br>b <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 15. Communication units containing coordination           | _____   | a <input type="checkbox"/><br>b <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 16. Communication units containing subordination          | _____   | a <input type="checkbox"/><br>b <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| 17. Word count  | _____   |  |       |
| 18. Words per C.U.  | _____   |  |       |

Schroeder Composition Scale

DIRECTIONS FOR COMPLETING DATA SHEET

- A. Enter child's name on data sheet.
- B. FIRST READ-THROUGH: Read the entire paper. Then complete items 1-4 by marking "yes" or "no" on the data sheet.

ITEM #1 The child maintains a time sequence in his story.

Example:

Yes

Once I went to a haunted house on Halloween. A witch and her pet goblin lived there. She asked me to come in and I did. She did not give me any candy. She wanted me to stay. I didn't because I was scared.

No

The pony is at the farm. The cow and the chicken play at home. Mother pony said the rabbit could come along. Mother and Grandfather are at the farm, too.

Comments:

JUDGE THE OVERALL PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF A LOGICAL TIME SEQUENCE. THE SENTENCES NEED NOT NECESSARILY BE IN STRICT CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, BUT A GENERAL TIME SCHEME SHOULD BE EVIDENT TO MERIT A YES RESPONSE.

ITEM #2 The child uses a concluding sentence or sentences to end his story.

Example:

Yes

My two brothers and I went fishing at Heim's lake. They didn't want me to come because they said I couldn't fish, but Mom insisted. My brothers had all those fancy gadgets for catching fish, but all I had was a pole and some worms. While my brothers caught two bluegills, I was catching a dozen trout. One of my brothers started to cast and got his hook hung in my other brother's clothes. Meanwhile a dog was having a feast on their bluegills. I headed for home with my fish. When I got home, Mom asked where my brothers were. "Oh, they're all tied up," I answered.

No

One morning, three fishermen went fishing. They got in their car and off they went to camp. In about two hours they were there. Mr. Peterson took their camping equipment out of the car. Mr. Hampton put the canoe in the water. In a few minutes they were off. Right after that three bears came to the camp. They went to work in a hurry, eating everything they could find. In a few hours guess who came? You're right -- the campers. They scared the bears away.



Comments:

THE JUDGMENT IS WHETHER OR NOT THE CHILD, IN HIS FINAL STATEMENT OR STATEMENTS, DOES ANYTHING WHICH OBVIOUSLY IS INTENDED TO BRING THE STORY TO A DEFINITE AND RECOGNIZABLE CONCLUSION, OR WHICH SERVES TO SUMMARIZE THE STORY, OR TO CRYSTALIZE OR IN SOME WAY INDICATE THE ESSENCE OF THE STORY.

ITEM #3 The child gives his story a title.

Comments:

NO EXAMPLES ARE NEEDED. SIMPLY INDICATE WHETHER OR NOT A TITLE APPEARS FOR THE CHILD'S STORY.

ITEM #4 The child expresses an abstract generalization or theme in his story.

Example:

Yes

No

It was then that I realized what it means to be famous. It means explaining to the younger generation what you live for. It means going places, seeing and doing things that you have always dreamed of doing.

If I were famous Tony Curtis would walk me down to his big beautiful 24 foot yacht. He would ask me to ride on it. He would wear a tuxedo everywhere.

Comments:

DOES THE CHILD'S STORY MAKE ANY KIND OF SIGNIFICANT POINT? DOES IT ILLUSTRATE ANY NOTION, IDEA, CONCEPT, FEELING, OR BEHAVIOR? DOES IT HAVE A THEME?

C. SECOND READ-THROUGH: Focus attention on items 5-11. Mark "yes" or "no" on the data sheet for each.

ITEM #5 The child uses direct discourse to carry the story line.

Example:

Yes

No

I was surprized at what I saw. It was a rocket! I was so shocked I didn't even hear Bobby come out. "How do you like it?" he asked. "Where did you get it?" I answered. "I made it. We're going to the moon."

The zebra told his mother he really did not mean to get himself dirty -- and he really did not.



## Comments:

THE QUESTION IS NOT ONE OF MECHANICAL CORRECTNESS. THE CHILD MAY NOT HAVE USED QUOTATION MARKS AT ALL, BUT STILL MAY HAVE INCLUDED DIRECT DISCOURSE. LOOK FOR INSTANCES WHERE THE STORY CHARACTERS ACTUALLY SPEAK.

ITEM #6 The child uses some imaginative ideas in his writing.

## Example:

Yes

Once upon a spring time there lived a dog pilot named Henry. Henry wanted to fly like a bird, but he couldn't. He went to ask famous Mrs. Huba how to fly, for she knew everything in the world.

No

Brian had a horse named Birdie. Once when he was riding, something hit Birdie on the leg. Away she went clear around the pasture. When she came to the ditch, Brian flew off. He almost went into the water, but he only got his feet wet. It was a long time before Brian took another ride on Birdie.

## Comments:

THE JUDGMENT REGARDS WHETHER OR NOT THE CHILD EMPLOYED ANY IDEAS WHICH WERE IMAGINATIVE DEPARTURES FROM THE COMMONPLACE, OR REPRESENTED ORIGINAL RESTRUCTURING OF COMMONPLACE IDEAS. THIS DOES NOT INCLUDE TRITE OVERSTATEMENTS, EXAGGERATIONS, AND PUNCHLINES WHICH ARE OBVIOUSLY INSERTED FOR EFFECT. GENUINE IMAGINATION IS THE STANDARD. BUT REMEMBER TO MAKE JUDGMENTS WITH REFERENCE TO CHILDREN, NOT ADULTS.

ITEM #7 The child uses repetition to heighten an effect.

## Example:

Yes

We used a globe to see the shape of places that were too far away -- too far away to ask about -- too far away to go to.

No

We used a globe to see the shape of places that were too far away to ask about. We knew we couldn't to there either.

## Comments:

REPETITION MAY OCCUR IN WORDS, PHRASES, OR IDEAS IN THE STORY.



ITEM #8 The child uses an original figure of speech.

Example:

Yes

He was a gray cloud floating in the sky.

Bread is a soft white food that is fluffy as llama's fur.

No

George's face was as white as a sheet.

Bread is a soft, white food.

Comments:

THE WRITING BEHAVIOR TO BE SOUGHT IN THIS ITEM WILL CONSIST OF COMBINATIONS OF WORDS WHICH RESULT IN ORIGINAL SIMILES, METAPHORS OR OTHER FIGURATIVE EXPRESSIONS. ONLY ORIGINAL FIGURES OF SPEECH MERIT YES RESPONSES, NOT MERE REPETITIONS OF COMMONLY USED ONES.

ITEM #9 The child includes some emotional and/or personal reaction to events in his story.

Example:

Yes

He liked the smell of his warm food and the feel of his soft bed. His happiness was complete.

No

At last he got home. He ate some warm food and got into his soft bed. Soon he was fast asleep.

Comments:

DOES THE CHILD ADD TO THE NARRATIVE OF HIS STORY ANYTHING WHICH SERVES TO ILLUMINATE THE FEELINGS, EMOTIONS, AND THINKING OF THE STORY CHARACTERS (OR THE WRITER) IN RELATION TO THE STORY EVENTS? (THIS WOULD LIKELY NOT INCLUDE MORE OR LESS ROUTINE STATEMENTS WHICH ARE SOMETIMES INCLUDED ALMOST MECHANICALLY, BUT FAIL TO ILLUMINATE IN ANY DETAIL THE CHARACTER'S FEELINGS, SUCH AS "BILLY LIKED HIS DOG.")

ITEM #10 The child adds a descriptive passage to the action of his story.

Example:

Yes

One stormy night when wind blew through the trees, a house stood on a high hill as ragged as could be. Spiders, bears, and lizards ran around inside.

No

There was a house on the hill. The thunder boomed around it. The lightning flashed. Spiders, bears, and lizards ran around inside the house.

## Comments:

THIS GOES BEYOND SIMPLE MODIFICATION OF A FEW WORDS. DOES THE CHILD, IN THE COURSE OF HIS STORY-TELLING, DEPART FROM THE ACTION OF THE STORY FOR THE PURPOSE OF DESCRIBING A PERSON, PLACE, EVENT, OR FEELING? IN THE EXAMPLE LABELED "YES" ABOVE, THE SENTENCE, "A HOUSE STOOD ON A HIGH HILL AS RAGGED AS COULD BE," APPEARS TO BE DESCRIPTION RATHER THAN ACTION, HENCE IT WOULD BE JUDGED A "DESCRIPTIVE PASSAGE."

ITEM #11 The child expresses humor in his composition.

## Example:

Yes

We wondered where they got all this cheese, so they said they got their cheese from talking cows, which we call yaks on earth.

"Aw-w-w, is it time to get up already?" Laura said.  
"No, Laura, but the house is burning down and I thought maybe we should get out before it fell on us," said mother.

No

One day there was a little girl who was studying to be a scientist. That day she made a rocket ship. She got in and took off. When she landed on the moon she saw little green men walking all around. They looked so funny that she laughed and laughed and laughed.

## Comments:

LOOK FOR THINGS WHICH ARE GENUINELY CLEVER OR FUNNY, NOT TRITE OR OBVIOUSLY INSERTED JUST FOR EFFECT. BE CAREFUL NOT TO GET HUNG UP ON STATEMENTS WHICH MAY APPEAR "CUTE" TO THE ADULT READER, BUT WHICH WERE NOT NECESSARILY CONSTRUCTED BY THE CHILD IN THE EFFORT TO BE HUMOROUS. COMMON FORMS OF HUMOR MAY INCLUDE UNDEPSTATEMENT, EXAGGERATION, AND PLAYS ON WORDS.

- D. THIRD READ-THROUGH: This is a sentence-by sentence analysis which may actually require several readings. In this phase of the rating, the paper is to be carefully analyzed for mechanical and syntactic details. Items 12 through 16 on the data sheet will be covered. Complete each item as discussed below and record responses on the data sheet as indicated.

ITEM #12 Communication units

Read through the paper and divide it into communication units by marking vertical lines lightly between them on the paper. Communication units are defined as follows:



- a. A communication unit is basically a sentence. It is, "a kernel sentence, or unit of predication, plus that which is attached to, or embedded within it." Thus, "He ate the old sandwich," and "Molly saw Jim driving the car down the street," are both communication units. "The man in the gray coat," and "Eating like a bunch of pigs," are not.
- b. Some statements, though they do not contain predication, can be communication units, depending upon how they are employed. For example, in "Hi. My name is Nancy.", the word "Hi" is a communication unit. "My name is Nancy." is another communication unit.

Consider the following passage:

"Who was that on the phone?"

"My dad."

In this case, "My dad." is also a communication unit, though there is no predication. It is not a complete kernel, but definitely carries a complete communication load.

- c. Many times children tend to connect sentences together in long strings with the use of coordinators, such as and, but, and so. Although technically each individual sentence so coordinated could be considered one communication unit, the present instrument allows two sentences so coordinated to represent one communication unit, especially if the two appear connected in thought. Thus, the marking of the following passage:

Mary saw Jean running down the street and so she ran after her/but when she got to the corner Jean was gone and Mary couldn't see anything/and it was getting dark and Mary was scared/and she didn't know what to do.

Having marked all the communication units in the paper, tally the number of units written and enter the total number in the box at the end of the line marked "communication units." Enter this number in the box marked "b" in items 13 through 16. Each written portion which remains and has not been classified as a communication unit is to be tallied on the line marked "fragments" and the total number of such fragments is entered in the box at the end of that line.

### ITEM #13 Capital Letters

Look at each communication unit you have marked. Does the child use capital letters correctly within that unit? If all capital letter usage is correct in that unit, place a tally mark on the line, and go on to the next unit. If there is any error in the use of capitals within that unit, do not record any tally, but

go on to check the next unit.

Add up the total tally marks when you have been through all the units. Enter the total in the "a" box.

ITEM #14 Terminal Punctuation

Just as with capital letters above, determine for each communication unit whether or not the child used terminal punctuation marks correctly within that unit. If he did, make a tally mark on the line. If not, make no mark.

Add up the total number of tally marks and enter in the box marked "a".

ITEM #15 Coordination within the communication unit

This refers to the child's tendency to coordinate sentences or sentence elements, usually with "and", "but", or "so".

An example of coordination of sentences would be: "Jerry saw the ice cream cone and he couldn't wait to get at it." Examples of coordination of sentence elements would be: "Susie and Helen were good friends." or "George dropped his books and tore off his coat."

Tally each communication unit which contains coordination and enter the total in the box marked "a".

ITEM #16 Subordination within the communication unit

Subordination will be among the more difficult structures to spot initially. In essence, subordination occurs whenever two distinct kernels occur in one communication unit, one being embedded in the other rather than being joined to it by simple coordination. The embedding may be accomplished by the use of simple inclusions such as "after", "although", "since," etc., or by the use of relative pronouns, such as "who", "which", "that", "when", "where"; "whoever", etc. Some subordination may occur without the use of such words, however, as the the case of "Mother said I should go."

Some examples of subordination:

He grabbed the rock that I wanted.

I couldn't tell him, since I didn't know.

After he had left, I shut the door.

If subordination occurs within a communication unit, mark a tally. If not, make no mark. Total the tally marks and enter in "a".



- E. QUANTITATIVE DATA: Complete the evaluation of the paper by calculating items 17 and 18.

ITEM #17 Word Count

Count the total number of words written in the composition and enter the number on the line.

ITEM #18 Words per communication unit

Count the total number of words appearing in fragments and subtract from the total word count. Divide the remaining number of words written by the number of communication units written (item #12) and place this number, correct to one decimal place, on the line.